



Speech by

**Hon. Paul Lucas**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

Hansard Tuesday, 23 November 2004

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Tilt Train Derailment**

**Hon. P.T. LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (9.48 a.m.): In the early hours of last Tuesday, at one minute past midnight, a diesel tilt train travelling from Brisbane to Cairns derailed near Rosedale, 50 kilometres north of Bundaberg. Eight of the nine cars left the section of track including the locomotive. Some 128 of the train's 156 passengers and crew were injured, but, thankfully, no-one was killed or sustained life-threatening injuries. Emergency services arrived at the site by 1 a.m. after being alerted by nearby residents who were the first on the scene to help. All passengers were evacuated from the train by 3.40 a.m. I pay tribute to the outstanding job done by all those involved—residents, emergency services personnel and medical staff at Bundaberg, Gladstone and Hervey Bay hospitals. I pay tribute to the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance, the State Emergency Service and the Salvation Army which set up outside the hospital and were also on the scene as well. I also pay tribute to the QR crew on board the train who set aside any concern for themselves to help passengers.

The Premier and I flew up to Bundaberg early on that morning in order to personally inspect the scene of the accident and, more importantly, to thank the rescue personnel, emergency services, police and medical staff for the outstanding job that they did in rescuing injured passengers. We also attended the Bundaberg Base Hospital and spoke with a number of passengers and crew and were uplifted by their good spirits and praise for the wonderful job done by not only their rescuers but also medical staff. I would also like to personally record my thanks to the many QR staff in so many areas who so promptly responded to facilitate the rescue, looked after passengers' needs, worked tirelessly to clear the track, remove the damaged train and restore the track to operating condition. I would like to thank QR CEO, Bob Scheuber, and his management team for their absolute focus on dealing with the accident and the support for their staff and passengers.

The first priority in any accident must be the welfare of those injured and ensuring that their needs are properly catered for, which I have outlined above. Indeed, as well as the medical treatment, QR had a team in place in the Bundaberg hospital specifically dealing with passenger and family support, together with its hotline for family members to contact for information. The second priority is to investigate the causes of the accident with a view to identifying what can be done to prevent, as far as possible, any such accident happening again. Within hours of the accident, Queensland Transport, as the regulator for the state's rail network, had approved the terms of reference, which I now table, for a joint State-Commonwealth independent investigation chaired by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. Officials from my department's Rail Safety Unit are also on the investigating team.

There have been issues raised, however, with the current legislation and its ability to protect witnesses who assist it from self-incrimination. This is standard procedure with Commonwealth aviation investigations. The purpose of aviation and rail safety investigations is not to point the blame but to find out what went wrong and to make suggestions to fix it. If witnesses refuse to assist the inquiry, then it severely compromises its ability to do the job that it is specifically set up to do. Later today I will introduce into the House urgent amendments to the Transport Infrastructure Act (1994) which cabinet approved yesterday.

The Transport Infrastructure Amendment Bill will assist the current investigation into last Tuesday's diesel tilt train derailment by providing witnesses with immunity from self-incrimination. It will mean that information witnesses provide to any rail safety investigation in Queensland cannot be used against them in other proceedings.

We all want to know what happened to cause the *Spirit of Townsville* to derail so that we can remedy it to prevent future accidents. These amendments will make it mandatory for witnesses to provide information to the rail safety investigators but have full protection in doing so. Everyone has a theory about the accident, but I urge everyone to please be patient and let the investigators do their job. I wish to outline some important factors to the House.

The rail safety investigation takes a 'no-blame' approach to the accident. Its first job is to find out what went wrong and what needs to be done to remedy it. The police, of course, are also conducting an investigation which is separate and independent to the rail safety investigation. It, of course, has a different task. First introduced in 1998, this was the first major tilt train incident in more than 2,770 trips. Half a million people travelled by tilt train within the first two years and more than 92,000 passengers have travelled on the two Cairns tilt trains since they began service in June last year. The accident occurred on a section of track that was upgraded in 1996 under the \$224 million north coast line project between Nambour and Rockhampton. It included upgraded steel bridges, concrete sleepers, curve easing and realignments, and continuous welded rail from Bundaberg to Rockhampton.

QR and the Queensland government have invested \$1.2 billion over the past decade to upgrade the 1,680 kilometre main north line. Some \$800 million has been spent on the Brisbane-Rockhampton section. I should say, while the member for Gregory is here, that this has been a bipartisan factor in terms of money being spent on the rail network in Queensland since the days of Bjelke-Petersen when compared to other states. In the past five years, \$17.2 million has been spent on the section between Littabella and Parana, where the derailment occurred, including track and bridge maintenance. QR monitors the condition of the track with safety inspections every second day and has a strict regime of other regular testing. In fact, the track was inspected and cleared the day before the accident.

Drivers are specifically qualified to operate the tilt trains and are certified that they know and understand a particular route. This dual competency is in line with world's best practice. Two drivers operate the tilt trains, which are also fitted with a driver vigilance system that ensures that the driver stays alert. I am advised by QR on the issue of automatic train protection that, after unsuccessful trials, QR believes it is not a proven technology in Queensland where we run both passenger trains and freight trains on the same network. The longer and heavier freight trains and older passenger trains have different characteristics to a high-speed passenger train and the ATP software finds it difficult to distinguish those characteristics. What this means is that unexpected brake applications can and have occurred in a passenger train which travels at 160 kilometres per hour. This is dangerous when passengers and staff are walking around the carriages.

Having said that, this is an issue that I hope the investigation will address. I know that QR is addressing the issues posed by this technology on our network on an ongoing basis. I am advised that both of the Cairns tilt trains underwent extensive track testing and passed all required inspections before entering service and the timing of their introduction in mid-June last year. Since 1997, running line derailments in Queensland have decreased by 10 per cent and collisions by 40 per cent. Level crossing incidents have halved. In fact, QR has not had a fatality involving a passenger train derailment or collision in 20 years. The last was in 1985. To give an idea about safety on our network compared with other states, Queensland has 0.053 rail fatalities per 100,000 population, and that includes other sorts of level crossing incidents and the like—about a quarter of those for New South Wales and Victoria.

Normal freight services and some passenger services have resumed on the line. A 40 kilometre per hour speed restriction is in place for all trains travelling through the accident section and a 100 kilometre per hour speed restriction is in place for all long-haul passenger trains. People must have, and should have, a right to expect confidence in the safety of Queensland's public transport. QR's safety record speaks for itself as does the accident speak for the importance of fully investigating the causes to ensure that as far as possible an accident such as this does not happen again.